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AUTHOR Trester, Mary Frances
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ABSTRACT

The developmental program emphasizes the early identification of children with learning problems through the observation of the regular classroom teacher in conjunction with a special education team working in a school setting. The developmental teacher is an important member of the special education team because he/she is in the school on a daily basis to monitor and maintain the student with special needs. Through ongoing inservice training which emphasizes self-directed learning, the resource teachers continue to formulate their needs in relation to the school in order to continually develop and meet the ongoing special education needs of students in the mainstream. (Author)

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THE DEVELOPMENTAL PROGRAMME

Presenters : Dr Earl Lagroix and Mary Francis Trester.

Bruce Georgeff, President of the Ontario Federation of Chapters of The Council for Exceptional Children, mentioned in his closing remarks in May 1977, that:

"The increased needs per capita for Special Service will have to be met by reorganizing existing departments, re-training existing staff, and using innovative forms of delivery of service. In my department we have moved to a Learning Resource Teacher network for the general delivery of assistance at the school level since this gives a higher proportion of staff time to be used within each school. We cannot add staff due to restricted budgets and yet we must service the needs of children we are discovering through our early intervention programmes while still carrying those with learning problems in the higher grades."

The Dufferin-Peel Roman Catholic Separate School Board felt this need to have a special education resource teacher in the school setting on a full-time basis for larger schools and half-time to service the smaller schools. Thus the Developmental Programme was initiated by Superintendent Earl J. Lagroix in 1975-76 in his family of schools.

Developmental Teachers are Resource Teachers within the school setting who work closely with the classroom teacher. They focus their skills and energy on the young child in order to fill in gaps in learning before the learning deficits magnify into a major learning problem. In order to identify missing skills, the teacher must study the sequence of learning from birth onward. In this manner, any deficits can be pinpointed and placed in proper sequence of skill development in order to see where the learning pattern breaks down.

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The Developmental Programme

Remediation then involves a study of the total development of the child in the areas of motor development, language, social skills, cognitive skills, etc., and teaching requires a close look at the child in order to observe where he is functioning in the various avenues of learning. If motor skills are not fully developed these will be emphasized in a slow relaxed atmosphere while the major learning involves a focus on the strengths of the child.

In order to implement the philosophy of emphasizing the strengths of the child the MOVE Programme (A Programme of Motor Training for Young Children) was written to be used by the regular classroom teacher beginning in the Junior Kindergarten and continuing through grade one.

The goal of the MOVE (Movement, Observation, Vision, Evaluation) Programme¹ was early identification of High Risk Children through the observations of the regular classroom teacher, in cooperation with the special education team within the school setting. This team, which includes the Developmental Teacher, Psycho-Educational Consultant, Social Worker, Speech Therapist and in some schools a Child Care Worker set about to programme for the High Risk Child within the school setting.

At the same time, the teachers become actively involved in the total process.

There is no person more qualified potentially to look at students in terms of their learning skills and styles than the teacher who spends her entire day in the teaching situation with the students in the classroom.

There is no person more qualified potentially to listen to the child's reactions to learning, his interests, his likes, his fears, his frustrations, his unique abilities, or creative endeavours.

The teacher can and must put the love in learning for the child who becomes an adult before he leaves the school environment. A child must love learning to learn. He must love himself to achieve and love others. This must be one of the primary goals of the teaching profession.

The Developmental Programme

The Move Programme stresses the importance of observation as each child moves within the learning environment.

No curriculum should determine what happens in a classroom. The child must be the prime focus for the teacher. Each child is an individual with his or her interests, abilities, deficits, gifts, likes and dislikes. The prime task of the teacher involved in the MOVE programme is the observation and notation of the specific learning characteristics of each child, for the learning programme will evolve from this observation.

The MOVE PROGRAMME emphasizes and programmes from the gifts of the child. Deficits are remediated but in the proper perspective with the cooperation of specialized personnel. A child will work to overcome learning problems if those learning problems are not the major focus of the teacher and the other students in his class.

As the program progresses, the teacher is able to look at the students in his/her class and state the learning profile in terms of gross and fine motor skills, listening and speaking skills, visual and visual-motor skills, behavioural characteristics, and cognitive and creative abilities.

Each teacher receives a developmental chart that traces each of the foregoing mentioned skills from age 2 to 6.² With the integration of her observation and this developmental sequence, she can determine the next step in learning for a particular student. In this way, frustration can be avoided and the child does not feel the need to compete, for he is shown that each person develops individually, at his own rate, with his own style.

In conjunction with the MOVE Programme, the Developmental Teacher helps to monitor and maintain the high risk children, with particular emphasis given to kindergarten through grade three.

At times the child can be helped within the classroom setting, and the Developmental Teacher can work in the class and programme for the teacher. On the other hand, some children can better be helped on a withdrawal basis and that flexibility is allowed within the model.

The Developmental Programme

The Developmental model is dynamic and heterogeneous by choice. It attempts to serve the individual school, by employing the strengths of the Developmental Teacher as well as the principal of the school, teachers and the Special Education team within the individual school setting. It adapts to limitations of space, budget, etc.

In cooperation with the individual school model for helping high risk children the family of schools can monitor the more difficult children through the channel of a Diagnostic Review Committee. This committee is comprised of a principal of a school with a special class, the superintendent, a special education resource teacher, a psycho-educational consultant and a social worker. The committee meets every second week, to discuss the students who are evidencing problems that the individual school does not feel equipped to deal with. As a result of these meetings, more information can be gleaned, new solutions or techniques can be attempted, or the student may be recommended for a special class placement, thereby a request is made for a hearing on an admission board conference. At this time the Special Education team plus the consulting psychiatrist or psychologist for the Board discuss alternatives which exist for the particular student. Perhaps a special class placement will be recommended at this time.

Through the Diagnostic Review Committee, the total picture of the special education needs for the particular family of schools can be determined, monitored, and executed, in cooperation with the individual school teams and teachers.

The Developmental Teachers meet as a group each week for In-Service. The goal of this model is to present methodology, new theory, and educational research. Immediately the children and teachers derive the benefits from the In-Service training.

In the past this has been a difficult goal to achieve, but this is viable and successful because the teachers involved discuss the needs in their schools, and from that discussion, the content of the sessions is chosen.

The Developmental Programme

The obvious result is that the critical needs of the children are examined and almost immediately Developmental Programmes are implemented to remedy the problem and or to assist the classroom teacher to integrate regular and special instructions for these children.

The framework used by the co-ordinator of the Developmental Teachers to foster better in-service development has been created and utilized by Malcolm Knowles, author of The Modern Practice of Adult Education³ and advocate of self-directed learning. With this technique, the resource teachers formulate their needs in relation to the school and students they deal with and the knowledge is compiled by the group as a whole, with the co-ordinator acting as facilitator. Each session has time dedicated to small group discussion for the sharing of information and any knowledge of sources and techniques is shared by the group so that information can always grow through mutual interest and sharing.

This particular model of self-directed learning has been most effective in so far as it fosters true adult education. The resource teachers learn from each other and they in like manner share information with the regular classroom teacher so that the teacher may implement new techniques within the classroom setting. The role of the resource teacher as a withdrawal teacher is minimal and the role of the resource teacher as a communicator with the regular teacher and a helper to her, and a person who introduces new materials and techniques is continually expanding.

Thus, we have tried to coordinate three major concepts in our Developmental Programme:

1. Early Identification of Children with Special Needs
2. Resource Teachers Within the School Setting
3. Ongoing In-Service Training with Emphasis Upon Self-Directed Learning.

Our programme is now entering its third year and we have resource teachers in three of the five families of schools in our school board, so we feel it is growing and providing for the needs of the schools for they have asked for expansion of the programme.

The Developmental Programme

The total elementary population in the family of schools is 3,692. Of that number .9% are in special classes. On the other hand, 10% are being helped by the Developmental Teacher, on a withdrawal basis or through programming within the classroom setting. The remaining students are provided for by the regular classroom teacher in the school.

The emphasis is prevention, mainstreaming, and programming by the regular classroom teacher in cooperation with a special education team in the school setting. The statistics speak for themselves.

By: Mary Frances Trester,
Special Education Resource Teacher,
The Dufferin-Peel R.C.S.S. Board,
100 Dundas Street West,
Mississauga, Ontario, Canada, L5B 1P6.
Phone: 270-4630, Ext. 21.

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